

The Lost Wife Study Guide

The Lost Wife by Alyson Richman

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Plot Summary

Lost Wife begins with an older man, Josef, getting ready for the wedding of his grandson. While he's at the wedding, Josef spots someone on the bride's side that seems to be familiar to him. After the reception, he goes to speak with her, convinced that he's seen her before. At first, she doesn't seem to recognize him, but he's positive he knows her when he sees the numbers tattooed on her arm. He introduces himself as Josef, referring to her as Lenka, his lost wife.

The story is then told in a mixture of flashback and passages from the present day. The chapters switch between the perspectives of the two different characters. For the most part, the past sections are told from the perspective of Lenka. Lenka met Josef when she started at an art academy. Her best friend was Josef's younger sister, Věruška. Lenka started to spend time with the family, even being invited on vacation with them.

Josef and Lenka both had strong feelings right off the bat. On vacation, they found time to sneak away from the rest of their family so they could start a relationship. Their early relationship flourished, but things soon took a dark turn. The Germans were on the move, and soon Prague was occupied.

Josef proposed to Lenka and the two were married. During the honeymoon, Josef admitted that he wanted Lenka to marry him because his family had secured papers for their family to go to America. Lenka refused because she didn't want to leave her family behind. Josef pleaded, but it was no use. She convinced him to go to America, and he promised that once he arrived he'd find a way to rescue her.

Lenka believes that Josef is killed when he's mistakenly listed as the causality of a sunken ship. Josef's family perished, but he was lucky enough to be pushed onto a lifeboat. Lenka is devastated by the news. She doesn't have time to mourn because she and her family are soon sent into the ghetto of Terezin. Lenka gets a job in the art department, making post cards and greeting cards for the Germans.

Lenka and the other Jews are treated inhumanely in the ghetto. She joins a resistance group of artists who are trying to capture what life is really like in the ghetto. Through some of their smuggler contacts they're able to get their drawings out of the tortured Jews, letting the world on the outside know how much they are suffering. The artists are punished, with many being outright killed or being sent off to Auschwitz.

Josef's sections are much shorter. Josef was able to make it to America. He wrote to Lenka as frequently as possible, but his letters were soon being marked as undelivered. He was told a few years later that Lenka had passed away. Josef tried to move on and start life with another refugee, Amalia, but his heart always belonged to Lenka. The rest of his sections focus on the family that he raised with Amalia, and the pain that he felt being the only survivor of his family.

Chapters 1-3

Summary

Chapter 1

The book begins in New York City, during the year 2000. The main character, Josef, is getting ready for the wedding of his grandson. When he arrives at the wedding he's surprised to see that the bride's grandmother looks like someone from his past. When he gets the chance he goes to greet her. She doesn't seem to remember him, but he keeps pressing when he notices the numbers tattooed into her arm. He identifies her as Lenka, his wife whom he thought was long lost.

Chapter 2

This chapter starts a few weeks before the wedding, documenting Lenka's thoughts. She has a painting that she's kept hidden for 60 years that she decides she wants to give as a wedding gift. This takes her back to her childhood. (flashback) She was raised in Prague. Her father was a glassworker who made beautiful pieces. She remembers that he had such a fond appreciation for life, and he was always bringing gifts home that reminded him of his wife. Both of her parents were very kind and loving towards her.

Her parents hired a nanny, Lucie, which soon became like a member of their extended family. Lucie taught her how to draw, which made a young Lenka very happy. Lenka's mother gave birth to another daughter, Marta. Lenka was jealous at first, but she quickly grew to love her sister. As Marta got older, she and Lenka began to compete more, not only for their parent's affection, but also for Lucie's.

Chapter 3

(Flashback continued)

Lucie soon got married and was pregnant with her own child. She still tried to come around every so often to be with Lenka and her family. As Lenka grew up, she went to art school. There she made friends with another girl, Věruška. Věruška invited a 17-year-old Lenka over one evening for Shabbat. It was there that Lenka met her older brother, Josef. The two instantly fell for one another, and Lenka took every opportunity she could to go over and spend more time at the house.

Analysis

Chapter 1

The first chapter mainly serves to set up the general concept of the book. Josef and Lenka's relationship in the present is never touched upon again. The story isn't about



what happened when they met up again in the year 2000, but how they first met back in the 30's and became separated. Their Jewish heritage is subtly brought up. When Josef sees the numbered tattoos on Lenka's arm, the reader knows the majority of the story will focus on the holocaust. The chapter also establishes when the present year is. This is important since the story jumps around so much in time, so it helps to give the readers a point of reference, especially for Josef's chapters.

The theme of Family Ties is established in this first chapter, not only with the wedding, but with Josef's recognition of his long lost wife, Lenka. This theme is continued into the next two chapters, where Lenka's ties with her family are explored.

Chapter 2

This chapter sets up the relationship that Lenka has with her family. This is one of the driving forces of the book. Establishing the relationship early on helps to explain why Lenka makes the decisions that she does later on in the book. This also foreshadows one of the themes of the book, Family Ties. More of the setting is established in this chapter as well. The majority of the early parts of the book take place in Prague, and it's important for readers to see what life was like for Lenka and her family before the occupation.

Chapter 3

This chapter once again highlights the theme of Family Ties to Lenka. Even though Lucie isn't technically a part of her family, she's still clearly considered a member by Lenka and everyone else. This is important during the later chapters when the occupation begins and the book explores Lucie's relationship with the family more.

Věruška is introduced, which is Lenka's introduction to Josef. The two hit it off instantly and this introductory chapter sets up their growing relationship. It also serves as a brief introduction to Josef's family, which is also explored in more detail during his subsequent chapters.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the theme of Family Ties in these chapters.

Discussion Question 2

How does the author indicate that Lenka was once a Jew and most likely was in a concentration camp?

Discussion Question 3

Why would Lenka have kept a painting hidden for sixty years?

Vocabulary

pomade, elegance, visceral, kinetic, gilded, goblets, enraptured, beguiled, palpable, giddy, rustic, meticulous, succinctly, bemused, indulgence



Chapters 4-6

Summary

Chapter 4

This chapter is told from Josef's perspective. He first talks about how his grandson always remarked that Josef never seemed like a romantic. This takes Josef back to 1947, when he was married to someone named Amalia.

(Flashback) Amalia was in Austria in 1947. She happened to find a letter one day addressed to someone in New York, a Mr. Abrams. She knew that he was Jewish, so she started to write to him about all of the persecution that she and the other Jews were experiencing. To her surprise, he wrote back and arranged for her and her sister to be taken to New York. Amalia almost didn't go because her younger sister was denied entry. She was going to stay with her, but her younger sister ran off and hid in the crowd. Amalia ended up going to America, where she met Josef. The two fell in love and were soon married.

In the present, Josef says that they both carried the weight of the war, and although they did love one another, there was always a hollowness between the two because of what they experienced.

Chapter 5

This chapter is told from the perspective of Lenka. (flashback) Lenka's family was starting to have financial trouble. Her father was losing clients, and one client finally admitted that it was because people were scared of doing business with a Jew. Lenka was given the opportunity to go on a two week vacation with Věruška and her family, something that she eagerly accepted since it meant she'd get to spend more time with Josef. When she arrived, she could feel that Josef returned her feelings.

Chapter 6

This short chapter is told from Josef's perspective. He thinks back to the later years where he was married to Amalia.

(flashback) Josef decided to become an obstetrician. He kept track of every baby he delivered, which was over 2,000 by the time he retired. He always compared this to the number of children that were lost in the holocaust, and he tried to take some solace in the fact that he was at least helping to bring some life back into the world. At the end of the chapter he says how hard it is to be a father, and that he now understands why his own father had so many expectations for him.

Analysis

Chapter 4

At first Josef makes it seem like he's going to talk about his marriage with Lenka, since that relationship was just hinted at in the previous chapters. Josef shocks the reader by jumping back in time and talking about his marriage to Amalia. More of the setting is explored, and for the first time the holocaust is brought up, once again foreshadowing the main events of the book, especially in Lenka's chapters. This also creates a mystery for the readers, since they're naturally going to find out what happened to cause the separation between Lenka and Josef.

The nature of Josef's relationship with Amalia is established towards the end of the chapter. Josef insists that the two loved one another, but as the book continues the readers can see that this might not necessarily have been the case.

Chapter 5

This chapter brings readers back to the growing relationship between Lenka and Josef, acting as a direct contrast to what was just explored in Josef's chapter. This chapter also does more to establish the setting, presenting the growing problems with Germany. Things continue to fall apart over the next couple of chapters, which is what forces Josef and Lenka to drift apart.

Chapter 6

One of the themes that is explored during the book is Parental Influence. This is shown several times throughout the chapter when Josef is talking about the strained relationship that he had with his father, and how he wished he understood what motivated his father when he was younger. This chapter also acknowledges for the first time that Josef's family is no longer in his life, which is also explored in the later chapters.

At first it might seem like the placement of this chapter is jarring, since it clashes with the previous two chapters that were about Josef and Lenka's relationships. The significance of the chapter is shown over the course of the following chapters, where there's more of a focus on Josef's strained relationship with his father.

Discussion Question 1

Describe the pressures that Lenka's father was facing as a Jewish businessman.

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the theme of Parental Influence.

Discussion Question 3

Why did Josef become a pediatrician?

Vocabulary

wan, correspondence, initiative, choreographed, curriculum, sullen, perspire, verdant, levity, proffered

Chapters 7-9

Summary

Chapter 7

This chapter is told from Lenka's perspective, continuing the flashback from her time at the vacation home. The first few days she was there all she saw Josef do was read. On the fourth day, he asked her where she kept going to. She told him she went out to draw, and he asked to go with her. She showed him a beautiful valley where she had a perfect view of the landscape. The two ended up kissing, and the rest of the vacation they kept stealing moments together where they could be alone.

Chapter 8

This is another short chapter told from the perspective of Josef. He talks about how his second wife was always distant towards people. He felt that whenever they were lying in bed together, they were always dreaming of other people.

Chapter 9 Summary

This chapter takes place from the perspective of Lenka, concluding her vacation. She spent the rest of her trip home thinking about Josef. When she returned home, her family was upset because someone had started a fire in her father's warehouse and scrawled anti-Semitic messages along the walls. Lenka asked if he went to the police, but both her parents just laughed at that.

Analysis

Chapter 7

This chapter jumps back to the budding relationship between Josef and Lenka. Lenka's artistic view is brought up when she brought Josef to see the valley that she had found. This is a reoccurring character trait of Lenka's. She frequently looked at the world with the eyes of an artist. In these early chapters she saw the world as being bright and colorful, and very full of life. As the chapters go on she started to notice the darker tones more, reflecting the change in the world and in her.

Chapter 8

This brief chapter once again highlights the trouble that Josef and Amalia face in their relationship. This sets up one of the themes of the book, Letting Go. Many of Josef's chapters are focused on explaining exactly why there's so much distance between Josef and Amalia.

Chapter 9

This chapter continues to set up the relationship between Josef and Lenka. These early chapters are also significant because they explore the person that Lenka was before the occupation. In these chapters, Lenka was much brighter and happier. The warehouse fire marks a turning point in the book, and throughout the rest of the story Lenka changed as the world around her gets darker.

Discussion Question 1

How does the author use color as a characterization?

Discussion Question 2

Compare Josef's life to Lenka's.

Discussion Question 3

Why did someone try to burn down Lenka's father's business?

Vocabulary

jutting, parchment, serenade, flushed, dirges, suffused, melancholy, dire, flagrant, ebullient, cloistered

Chapters 10-12

Summary

Chapter 10

This chapter takes place from Josef's perspective. (Flashback) In 1956 he bought a television for his family. He was pleased that it caused Amalia to smile. Watching the television made him think about how little he and his wife communicated. They are both still lost in the past. The chapter ends with him thinking about what it was like for him to run away from his home during the war, and what it must have been like for Amalia.

Chapter 11

This chapter is told from Lenka's perspective, taking place shortly after the fire at the warehouse. (flashback) Lenka was telling her younger sister the story of the Golem. The Golem was supposedly made to protect the Jews from the Romans. Lenka told her sister that supposedly the Golem still exists, ready to protect the Jews if they ever need it again.

Chapter 12

This chapter takes place from the perspective of Josef shortly before going to the wedding. Josef is thinking about how whenever he dreams, he always dreams of his lost love. It's at the point where whenever he dreams; he hopes that he will never wake up so he will get to be with her forever.

Analysis

Chapter 10

Josef keeps talking about the relationship problems between him and Amalia. They both have dark pasts that they are unable to deal with. The theme of Letting Go is demonstrated in both of them not being able to let go and that it is making them both miserable. Neither one of them would speak to one another, so Josef decided to get a television because he wanted to fill the silence with noise. This was comforting for both of them, since it gave them a distraction from the pain that they are feeling.

Chapter 11

This chapter once again shows the type of person that Lenka was before the occupation. Lenka knew that her sister was afraid, so she tried to tell her a story that would comfort her. It was clear at this point that Lenka was still full of hope. While she was starting to worry about the threat of an occupation, she didn't quite grasp the reality



of the situation. Readers can infer that she was hopeful that the German threat would be over soon and they could get back to their normal lives.

Chapter 12

This is another chapter that highlights the relationship trouble between Josef and Amalia. It's clear now to readers that Josef still has feelings for Lenka, and he was never able to move on from her. This is one of the themes of the book and is something that is frequently explored through Josef's character.

Discussion Question 1

Why has Josef never quite been able to let go of Lenka?

Discussion Question 2

How do Josef and Amalia deal with the emotional distance between them?

Discussion Question 3

What does Lenka telling her sister a story about the Golem say about Lenka's character?

Vocabulary

whittle, wistful, mottled, blatantly, hearsay, volatile, bereaved, inconsolable, irretrievable, thankless

Chapters 13-15

Summary

Chapter 13

This chapter continues from the perspective of Josef. Josef expands about how he dreams about Lenka. When he first came to America, he couldn't tolerate strawberries because they reminded him of the time that he spent with Lenka at their vacation home. He thinks to a time where he was dreaming of strawberries, of being with her. He woke up next to Amalia, and stated that when he and Amalia kissed, it tasted like nothing.

Chapter 14

This chapter takes place from Lenka's perspective, during the years of 1938-1939. (flashback) Lenka had been seeing Josef in secret. Things in Prague were getting grimmer, and everyone was worried about a possible German invasion. Lenka and the rest of the Jews were trying not to draw attention to themselves. One of Lenka's friends, Elsa, snapped during art class. She couldn't handle the fact that they were no longer drawing with color. She didn't turn up to school. Lenka went to investigate and the two started to talk about how their families were trying to leave Prague, but they just didn't have the money. When Lenka went to talk to Josef, he decided that the two of them should get married in secret, and the chapter ends with them on their honeymoon.

Chapter 15

This chapter takes place from Lenka's perspective, but is told between the events of the last chapter. (flashback) Josef was arguing for them to get married. He said his parents were getting papers on the black market to leave for America. If they were married, they'd be able to bring Lenka. Lenka said she would only say yes if Josef was able to get her family out too, otherwise she would never leave.

Analysis

Chapter 13

This chapter continues from where the last one left off. Josef outright admits that his feelings for Amalia aren't anywhere as strong as his feelings were towards Lenka. Josef is still obsessed with Lenka, even though they haven't been together for decades.

Chapter 14

The artistic view is brought up once again through the character of Elsa. Elsa was being driven insane by the fact that the students were no longer able to draw in color. She wanted to be able to draw attention to herself, but she couldn't because of the



occupation. This chapter also brings up the fact that families were starting to leave Prague because of the growing danger from the Germans. Over the course of the next few chapters the occupation is explored in more detail and begins to get increasingly severe for the Jewish citizens of Prague.

Chapter 15

The theme of Family Ties is officially brought up for the first time in this chapter. It's something that has been foreshadowed before with Lenka's close relationship to her family, but she officially made it clear to Josef that she wouldn't leave without them. This also answers the questions that readers may have about why Lenka isn't with Josef in the present.

Discussion Question 1

Why did Josef ask Lenka to marry him?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the significance of strawberries to Josef.

Discussion Question 3

Why did Elsa 'snap' in art class?

Vocabulary

buoyant, rapier, stifle, troubled, masochistic, nonchalant, barbarous, accession, equanimity

Chapters 16-18

Summary

Chapter 16

This chapter is told from Lenka's perspective. (flashback) Lenka was getting ready to marry Josef, who promised that he would be able to get everyone out. The two of them were married and shared a night together as husband and wife. Josef told her that he couldn't actually get her family out, just people who were related to him. As his wife, Lenka was included. Lenka was devastated, and refused to leave. Her parents tried to convince her that going was the best idea, but she still stubbornly refused, unable to bear the thought of leaving them to the Nazis.

Chapter 17

This chapter is told by Josef. He thinks back to his wedding with Amalia, admitting that he doesn't remember any of the details. He reiterates that he truly did love her, and nobody forced the two of them to get together. He does remember her face the day that both of their children were born.

Chapter 18

Josef admits that things have always been strained between him and his sister since leaving Lenka behind. They hardly spoke after that incident. He thinks back to the wedding night, remembering how it was Lenka's father who insisted that he not tell Lenka until after the wedding. Despite that, he did try and bring it up, but Lenka kept insisting that it should wait until after they spent their honeymoon evening together.

Analysis

Chapter 16

This chapter builds on the conflict that was set up in the last chapter. Josef was desperate for Lenka to leave with him, but she refused to abandon her family. Josef convinced her that she could get her family out as well, but readers know this isn't the case. Lenka's family pushed for her to leave because they cared about her and didn't want anything bad to happen to her. This occurs several more times throughout the book. Lenka's parents always tried to protect her, but Lenka and later Marta refused to abandon them. The reason that the book didn't start right with the German occupation was so readers could see the relationship between Lenka and her family, making it easier to understand why she didn't want to leave them in these later chapters, even in the face of possible death.



This demonstrates the theme of Family Ties in that Lenka wasn't about to save herself when she knew that her family may die. The fear of never seeing them again terrified her and made her turn down Josef's offer to take her away from the war that was coming.

Chapter 17

Josef once again tried to convince the reader that he and Amalia had a loving relationship. While it's clear that he did care about her, his feelings weren't exactly love. It seems more like their relationship was one born out of their mutual suffering. Josef even later admits that part of the reason he was with Amalia was because he was so afraid of being alone after losing Lenka. Josef does feel strongly about his children. He constantly compares those feelings towards the one that he has to Amalia, reinforcing the belief that he didn't really love Amalia like he claimed.

Chapter 18

This is one of the few Josef chapters that directly ties into the events occurring in Lenka's chapters. Josef bringing up the strained relationship with his sister ends up being tragic in a few chapters when it's revealed that Josef lost all of his family when their ship was attacked. He was never able to reconcile with his sister. Josef frequently mentions that along with losing Lenka, one of his biggest regrets is how he was never able to fix things with his various family members.

Discussion Question 1

What are some of the regrets that Josef, as an older man, has?

Discussion Question 2

Why won't Lenka leave with Josef for America?

Discussion Question 3

How does Josef feel towards Amalia?

Vocabulary

dowry, betrothal, dissuade, officiated, pompous, allowable, managerial, compensation, gratuitous

Chapters 19-21

Summary

Chapter 19

Josef continues to think back to the night he spent with Lenka. (flashback) Josef pleaded with Lenka, trying to explain that her father supported the idea. She insisted that she wasn't going to abandon the family that she spent 20 years with, and there was nothing Josef could do to convince her otherwise.

Chapter 20

This chapter takes place from Lenka's perspective. (flashback) Lenka went home to argue with her parents. She told them she would never leave, and she couldn't imagine what would make them want to send her away. Her parents insisted that she needed to go because Germany was going to invade any day, but she wouldn't budge.

Chapter 21

This chapter is told from Lenka's perspective. (flashback continued) Lenka refused to go with Josef. Josef wanted to stay, but Lenka convinced him that he had to go, so he could get to America and find a way to bring her over. After he left, the Germans officially took over and started to enact strict laws. To make matters worse, Lenka was pregnant. Josef continued to write for the first two months, but things took a turn for the worse. Lenka read that a ship was shot down by the Germans, and Josef and his family were listed amongst the casualties.

Analysis

Chapter 19

This is another chapter where Lenka highlights the importance of her family, again stating the theme of Family Ties. Her actions with her family actually help to explain some of the feelings that Josef has in the future towards his own family members. Josef constantly saw how strong Lenka's relationship was with her family, something that he felt like he lacked with his own family members. She wasn't willing to leave her family, but Josef was willing to leave his if it meant being with Lenka. The only reason that he ended up leaving was because she talked him out of it and convinced him that he had to go so he could get to America and find a way to get her out.

In the future, Josef expresses his grief over not being able to have a better relationship with his family, especially his father. Josef goes into more detail with this towards the end of the book, when he talks about being surrounded by the ghosts of his family.



Chapter 20

In a continued flashback, Lenka's family kept trying to push her into leaving because they wanted her to be safe. Lenka wouldn't abandon them, which continues the theme about Family Ties. In a way, this also shows one of the other themes, Parental Influence. Lenka's mother and father later had similar arguments after the occupation. Lenka's mother pushed for her father to abandon her when she was sentenced to Auschwitz, but he refused to listen and stayed with her, just like Lenka was doing. Lenka's family remained faithful to one another throughout the whole book, even when they witnessed other families fall apart around them in the wake of the occupation.

Chapter 21

This chapter marks a major turning point in the book. Lenka underwent several drastic changes. Not only was she pregnant in a German occupied Prague, but she also had to deal with the fact that she believed Josef was dead. Lenka entered into a state of severe depression following these events, which caused her to lose their child. This is also a new plot point for readers, since it hasn't been mentioned before that Lenka believed Josef was dead, and Josef hadn't yet gone into any details about his departure from Prague.

Discussion Question 1

Why wouldn't Lenka leave with Josef, her new husband?

Discussion Question 2

Compare Lenka's feelings for her family and Josef's feelings for his family.

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the theme of Family Ties in these chapters.

Vocabulary

stoic, conciliatory, transgression, palpable, baneful, harbinger, condolences, frenetic, cacophony

Chapters 22-24

Summary

Chapter 22

Josef thinks back to the night of the attack. (flashback) He was indeed on the boat that was attacked, but his father pushed him and another young refugee, Isaac, onto a lifeboat. The ship sunk and the lifeboat was damaged. Josef lost his family, but he and Isaac survived.

Chapter 23

Josef continues to think back on his life. (flashback continued) Isaac became his best friend, the only person that Josef feels truly knows him. Isaac played the violin at his and Amalia's wedding. Josef tried to write a letter to Lenka to tell her that he survived, but it was returned to him, unopened. It now sits amongst a stack of toys that he had purchased for their child.

Chapter 24

This chapter is told from Lenka's perspective, and takes place over the year after she thought Josef had died. (flashback) Lenka's health took a turn for the worse after hearing about Josef. She lost her child, which caused her to spiral into depression. The occupation continued to worsen in the following year, and the family was only able to get by thanks to Lucie constantly coming by to take care of them. Lucie brought art supplies for Lenka, but Lenka was having trouble drawing again. Lenka ran into an old student from her academy. She told Lenka she had hidden her yellow star of David to sneak into a movie, *Snow White*. It inspired her to start drawing again. When Lenka returned that night, it was all she could think about.

Analysis

Chapter 22

Josef explains to the reader what happened during the night of the attack where he supposedly died. Josef was saved by his father, something which has a profound impact on him in the present. This explains to the readers why Josef has been talking about his family in the previous chapters. Isaac is introduced for the first time. He doesn't do much at this point in the story, but he comes up again later when Josef is exploring the end of his marriage.

Chapter 23



The pain that Josef feels for losing Lenka is made even worse now that readers know he was not only expecting to have a future with Lenka as his wife, but also she would have been the mother of his children. Josef couldn't bring himself to get rid of the letters, or the toys that he had picked up for their unborn child. This once again brings up the theme of Moving On. Even though Josef had started a life with Amalia, he can't let go of the past relationship that he had with Lenka, and it's clear that he's holding out hope that Lenka will one day return to him.

Chapter 24

The strong family bonds between Lenka's family and Lucie is brought up again. The German occupation had changed many things for the Jewish citizens of Prague. They'd been forced to give up all their wealth and were struggling to get any food, since they were limited to ration coupons and could only go to the stores at set times. Lucie provided for the family in any way that she could, making sure that they always had food, and later trying to help preserve items that were important to them.

Another theme is introduced around the idea of Risks. Lenka remarked that she would never think to go to the movies because it would mean breaking the law. She kept her yellow star displayed on her at all times. Her friend on the other hand was actively trying to resist the occupation by hiding her star and going to see Snow White. It was a small act of rebellion, but it was meaningful to her because it showed that she's not willing to bend to German rule.

Discussion Question 1

What evidence is given for showing that Josef has not really moved on from losing Lenka?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the theme of Family Ties in this section.

Discussion Question 3

How did Josef and Issac survive the bombing of their ship?

Vocabulary

appendage, sumptuous, decadently, surreptitiously, repetitive, benign, maudlin, apropos

Chapters 25-27

Summary

Chapter 25

Josef continually thinks back to that night on the lifeboat. He wishes that there was some way he could have made room for his father. In his darkest moments, he imagines that Lenka was there with him. He thinks back to the night where Amalia died. He truly missed her and was saddened by her loss, but he knew that his love for her was never as strong as it was towards Lenka.

Chapter 26

This chapter is told from Lenka's perspective. (flashback) Lenka and her family were being moved out to a ghetto, in Terezin. At the time, Lenka was actually happy because she heard that it was going to be an all Jewish community and they would have the chance to find work. In the present she remarks how wrong she was, and how she had no idea at the time that the Germans were rounding up the Jews and putting them into concentration camps. Before they left, the family gave what valuables they had left to Lucie, who promised to one day return them.

Lenka helped a young child, Hans, while they were in transit. When they arrived, the living conditions were horrible. Lenka was at least lucky enough to get a job with some other artists. They were assigned to paint postcards for the Germans.

Chapter 27

(flashback continued) Lenka couldn't trust any of the women in the barracks. Everyone was always trying to steal what meager supplies were available. Lenka made friends with one of the other artists, a woman named Rita. Rita helped teach her how to smuggle out some of the art supplies. Rita and Lenka would bring these to the children so they had something to do and it was a way to lift their spirits. As the months went on, the conditions worsened. Everyone was constantly getting sick, and there was never enough supplies to go around. The men were worked hard, and the few moments that Lenka got to see her father she could see how much he had aged.

Analysis

Chapter 25

Josef keeps showing that his heart still belongs to Lenka. In his darkest moments he didn't seek any comfort from the new relationship that he had with Amalia, but instead he tried to hide in the past and remember his past relationship with Lenka. Josef also brings up the regret he feels for not being able to do more for his father. This has more



impact because of the past chapters that have detailed Josef's relationship with his parents, and how he now feels like he's grown up to be exactly like his father and has a better understanding of why he acted the way he did.

Chapter 26

Lenka's optimistic nature shines through once again. She was hopeful about being relocated into Terezin because she thought her family would be able to find work again, and they would be in an all Jewish community. Of course, things just ended up getting worse for Lenka when she and her family were forced into Terezin. The bonds between Lucie and Lenka's family are shown one final time when Lucie offered to take care of the valuables from Lenka's family. The reader later learns that Lucie held on to those items during the entirety of World War II.

Chapter 27 Analysis

Lenka was starting to experience just how bad things can be in the ghetto. They were already overstaffed and under supplied. Lenka noted that everyone was fighting with one another for supplies, but she and her family continued to remain loyal towards one another and tried to help each other out. Lenka got the first hints of the resistance through her friendship with Rita. This becomes important in the following chapters when Lenka started looking for ways to resist the Germans. This hints at the theme of Risks, and suggests that more risk taking will be on the way. The author seems to suggest that a people who have nothing to lose often take the most risks.

Discussion Question 1

What did Lenka do in the camps to keep from focusing on the negative things around her?

Discussion Question 2

What is Josef's one biggest regret in regards to his father?

Discussion Question 3

When Amalia died, what did Josef realize?

Vocabulary

pantomime, stagnate, rancid, lethargic, segregate, stallag, aggrieved, shunned, accosted

Chapters 28-30

Summary

Chapter 28

(flashback) Lenka heard from Rita that there was a resistance forming. They were trying to get the true message across of what life was like in the ghetto. Rita specifically mentioned a young painter, Petr Kien. Apparently he had managed to hide a drawing of what the living conditions were like for the elderly, locked away in windowless rooms to die. Weeks later, someone came by looking for new artists for a project in the technical department. Lenka was chosen. Lenka got the chance to meet Petr who was also working on the project, and she felt a strong connection to him.

Chapter 29

(flashback continued) Lenka was put to work with the rest of the artists. They were working like engineers and architects, drawing up plans for different buildings and transports. Lenka discovered that these men had drawn up the original plans for the ghetto, so they knew where the best hiding spots were. Lenka made friends with an older painter, Otto. After a few weeks, she asked Otto if he knew anything about the resistance. He didn't want to speak of it, simply saying that he had a wife and daughter and didn't want to think about such things. Lenka had a feeling that Fritta and Haas, two other artists, were somehow part of the resistance.

Chapter 30

Josef talks about how he sometimes had days where he thought he saw Lenka. Amalia would refer to these as ghost days, and she had them, too. Josef remembers that he was happy the day that he met Benjamin, the man that would go on to marry his daughter, Rebekkah, since he could sense that the two of them were very much in love, just like he used to be with Lenka.

Analysis

Chapter 28

Lenka was introduced to Petr for the first time. Petr acts as something of a red herring. While he was part of the resistance movement, he wasn't one of the key members, just another participant. The writer makes it seem like Petr is going to be a larger character in the story, but he only makes a few brief appearances. Lenka even mentions that she felt a strong connection to him, which is later implied to be a romantic attraction. This could be seen as Lenka exemplifying the theme of Moving On, but it's hard to say since she never actually entered into a relationship with Petr. She was at least considering the idea of a relationship without Josef at this point.



Chapter 29

Lenka met and becomes friends with Otto in this chapter. Otto is only in the book for a few chapters, but he still ended up being one of Lenka's closest friends in the ghetto. Other members of the resistance are introduced. Fritta and Haas only appear very briefly in the story, but it was their actions that caused the paintings to leak to the rest of the world, which had a very dramatic effect on Lenka's life in the later chapters. The theme of Risk is introduced and the reader understands that Lenka will most likely become involved with the resistance.

Chapter 30

This chapter touches upon the theme of Parental Influence. When Josef saw his daughter with Benjamin, he was reminded of the way that he used to be with Lenka, since they both have very similar mannerisms with their partner. This also made him grieve even more over his lost love, Lenka. It is something that, at this point, he felt he will never overcome, nor did he want to. However, it should be noted that this loss of his love hasn't made him bitter, just regretful. He wonders how things might have been if other choices had been made.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the theme of Risk in Lenka's timeline.

Discussion Question 2

Why did Lenka want to become involved with the resistance?

Discussion Question 3

Why was Josef happy for his daughter when she met Benjamin?

Vocabulary

tempestuous, beholden, apex, zenith, callous, divisive, gallows, onus, bereft

Chapters 31-33

Summary

Chapter 31

Josef starts to think about his children. He remembers when Rebekkah gave birth. They nearly lost the child, but the doctors were able to treat her baby, whom they decided to name Jason. Josef's son, Jakob, struggled when he was young. He was a very smart child, but he had social problems. He had to go to a special private school, where he thankfully excelled. Jakob has lived his entire life with Josef. Whenever Josef asks if he wants to move out, Jakob insists that he is happy there. Josef loves his children, just as he did Amalia, but he still finds himself wondering what life would be like if he was with Lenka, and what the children they would have had together would be like.

Chapter 32

Josef thinks back to the day of Amalia's funeral. Isaac played his violin for her, and it made Josef think that Issac loved her in a way that Josef never could. Josef knew that his heart belonged to Lenka, and to him the funeral was as much for her as it was for Amalia.

Chapter 33

After the funeral, Josef expected that Isaac would come by when the family sat Shiva. He never did, claiming that he was sick. Josef was already starting to forget Amalia. He knew that there would be things that reminded him of her in the future, but it wasn't like when he lost Lenka. He later spoke with Isaac, and he came to realize that Isaac and Amalia must have had a relationship together.

Analysis

Chapter 31

The themes of Family Ties is shown through the relationship that Josef has with Jakob. Josef knew that Jakob has problems, and he tried to be very supportive of him. Josef enjoys having Jakob around, but he also wants his son to feel like he has a life of his own. Jakob insists that he enjoys being with Josef though, and the two of them stick together into the present. This also touches on the theme of Living Life, since one of Josef's fears is that he's keeping Jakob from doing this.

Chapter 32

This is one of the chapters that shows Josef really wasn't in love with Amalia. Instead of mourning his wife, he mourned Lenka, who at this point had been out of Josef's life for

around 30 years. Josef discovered the relationship that Amalia had with Isaac. He didn't seem to be bothered by it. If anything he seemed happy that Amalia had someone to love her in a way that Josef knew he never could.

Chapter 33

The fragile relationship between Josef and Amalia is explored again after her death. Josef felt like he was already forgetting about her, something that he clearly hadn't been able to do with Lenka after all these years. He makes his relationship with Amalia seem more like a friendship, which is why he didn't seem to be bothered by the fact that Amalia and Isaac had a secret relationship.

Discussion Question 1

Describe Josef's relationship with Amalia.

Discussion Question 2

How does the reader know that Josef didn't truly love Amalia as he did Lenka?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the theme of Living Life in this section.

Vocabulary

epiphany, protege, intuition, prosthetic, apoplectic, masticated, deluge, bombastic, tenuous

Chapters 34-36

Summary

Chapter 34

(flashback) By the year of 1943, Lenka and the other artists had smuggled enough art supplies to the children so they could start making their own collages. Lenka was touched by the drawings the children created, since it was so full of life and color. Not all of the drawings were filled with color. Some of the children had drawn images capturing their arrival and life in Terezin. Lenka found those drawings to be the most profound and powerful.

Chapter 35

Back in the present day, Josef recalls that after Amalia's death he went looking for any letters that Amalia might have written to Isaac. He didn't find anything, and in fact Amalia seemed to own few possessions. Each one he looked at reminded him of the life that he shared with Amalia. When he went to sleep that night, his dreams were filled with memories of Amalia and not Lenka.

Chapter 36

This chapter takes place in 1943, back in Terezin. The children had enough stolen art supplies where they were able to put on a simple performance. Lenka was pleased, and saw it as a way for the children to show some resistance towards their captors. After the performance, Lenka realized that her friend, Rita, was pregnant. She was worried about Rita, since all of the pregnant women were shipped off to the east. Lenka had even heard about a doctor that was performing abortions in secret. Rita was upset that Lenka was encouraging her to get rid of the baby. She ended up marrying the man who impregnated her, Oskar. Lenka tried to bring Rita extra food, but she always refused. She finally revealed months later that it was because she didn't want to gain any weight because she was afraid if anyone found out she was pregnant, they would take her away and have her killed.

Analysis

Chapter 34

Lenka was gaining more inspiration to join the resistance. She was touched by the drawings that the children have created. Lenka is also showing the theme of Risks and that she clearly believed that some risks were worth taking. Lenka and the other artist keep stealing small art supplies to give to the children so they would have something to do while they were in the ghetto. This small act was something that could be punishable by death if they were ever caught. Lenka and the others keep stealing the supplies



anyway, something that Lenka would never have previously done in Prague. In her eyes, it was worth taking the risk because it brought so much enjoyment to the children.

Chapter 35

Josef starts to show some affection towards Amalia when he dreams of her. This is an important detail. The reader is given the impression that Josef wasn't romantically interested in Amalia, but that doesn't mean that he didn't care about her at all. Josef and Amalia shared a friendship, even if Josef wasn't able to give his heart to her like he did Lenka.

Chapter 36

Lenka continued to show the theme of Risks in the way that she and the others used art and performances to defy their German captors. This was their way of saying that they weren't just going to surrender, and no matter what the Germans threatened them with they were going to go on and keep living, which is actually another one of the themes.

The grim nature of the ghetto is explored in more detail when Rita became pregnant. Rita was so afraid of going to the doctors because she thought she would just be sent off to a death camp if they discovered that she was pregnant. She didn't want to get an abortion either since she wanted her child to live. She tried to hide the pregnancy by keeping her weight down, which was, of course, unhealthy for the child and caused problems in the later chapters.

Discussion Question 1

Why was Lenka smuggling art supplies?

Discussion Question 2

Why is Josef now having dreams about Amalia after her death?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the theme of Risks.

Vocabulary

invigorated, adamant, ethereal, emaciated, traumatized, viscous, febrile, imbued, falsified

Chapters 37-39

Summary

Chapter 37

This chapter is told from Josef's perspective. Josef thinks back to a time when he was at a planetarium with Jakob. Jakob had asked if all the stars represented someone that died. Josef thought this was a beautiful idea. It made him think about Amalia, and he imagined that she was watching over her family. He hoped that she was happy with her family, and he imagined that she would be watching when his grandson, Jason, got married.

Chapter 38

This chapter is told from Lenka's perspective. (Flashback) Rita had been pregnant for six months, still managing to hide it from the Germans. More and more refugees were coming into Terezin, even though they were beyond full capacity. Lenka discovered that Fritta and Haas were painting images of the decrepit elderly that were kept in the windowless attics.

Chapter 39

This short chapter takes place one month after the previous one. (flashback) Lenka noticed that Rita was looking increasingly sickly. She tried to convince her to see a doctor, but Rita pointed out that was probably more dangerous for her to do so. The chapter ends with Lenka noticing that Rita's water had broken.

Analysis

Chapter 37

The unique relationship that Amalia and Josef had is looked over in more detail during this chapter. Josef didn't love Amalia like he did Lenka, but the two of them still had a family together. Josef constantly mentioned how both he and Amalia felt alive when their children were present. Josef knew that Amalia didn't love him any more than he loved her, but they both truly loved their children. They wanted them to be able to live their life to the fullest, since they were both too trapped in the past and unable to move on to live their own lives. The themes of Living Life, and Family Ties, are both intertwined in this chapter as the reader sees how many decades removed from the war, its aftermath is still noticeable in the survivors.

Chapter 38

Things continued to get darker in Terezin. The already overfilled camp was constantly getting more refugees in. Rita was still determined to hide her child from the Germans, even though it meant risking the health of her child. Lenka discovered more about the resistance, specifically the type of paintings they were making. This becomes relevant in the following chapters when the Germans were angry about those images being leaked to the general public outside of the ghetto.

Chapter 39

This chapter serves mostly to move the Rita plot forward. Rita's pregnancy is important, since the drawing that Lenka originally got in the beginning of the book is the one that she drew of Rita and her family. That Rita was in danger from the pregnancy, from being detected, as well as threatening her health, is part of the conflict in these chapters and of Lenka's past timeline.

Discussion Question 1

What was the 'glue' that held Josef and Amalia's marriage together?

Discussion Question 2

Why didn't the Germans want the paintings to get out of Germany?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the theme of Living Life.

Vocabulary

sadistic, diligent, inauspicious, beneficiary, bestowed, academia, languorous

Chapters 40-45

Summary

Chapter 40

(flashback) Rita managed to give birth, but the child barely survived. Nobody expected it to last the night. Oskar brought Lenka over, begging her to draw a portrait of the child. Lenka captured Rita and her child on a stolen piece of paper, using her own blood to add some color to the drawing.

Chapter 41

Josef admits that he never told his family about Lenka. He thinks that they would have looked at his marriage to Amalia as being done out of fear, because he wouldn't want to be alone. He admits that was part of it. His daughter told him at one point that he was listed among the dead during World War II. He was devastated when he found this out because he kept imagining Lenka mourning his loss, having no hope in the last moments of her life.

Chapter 42

Josef spent years going to the Red Cross, waiting to hear some news about Lenka. He was always hopeful that she was alive. After a few years, he finally heard that Lenka and her family had been moved to Auschwitz. His case worker told him that it was believed they were gassed upon arrival. Josef noted that there was no record of any child.

Chapter 43

(flashback) Rita's child didn't last more than a few days. She was never able to recover. Her hands were always shaking, so she was useless in the art department and was sent to a camp in the east. In the present, Lenka remarks that she did research on Terezin after the war. The town was originally meant to hold only around 7,000 people, but in the winter of 1943 it housed more than 50,000 Jews. She remembers how chaotic the barracks became. Everyone fought one another, trying to get their hands on whatever meager supplies were around.

Lenka became friends with Petr after Rita was taken away. She enjoyed the contrast between Petr and Otto. Petr painted portraits, while Otto painted bleak melancholy landscape drawings. Neither one of them shared the resistance with her, and Otto seemed glad that she didn't participate. He didn't want her to get taken away. One evening, Petr drew a portrait of Lenka, and she was surprised how beautiful she looked in it.

Chapter 44



Lenka felt a closeness to Petr after the drawing. She imagined that the two of them were secret lovers. She eventually asked Petr about the resistance. He admitted that he and some of the other artists had been drawing life in Terezin. With the help of an engineer, Jíří, they had even been smuggling some of the paintings to the outside world. Lenka wanted to help, but Petr insisted that it was too dangerous. She did tell Petr about the drawing she had done of Rita. Petr told her to bring it to Jíří to preserve and hide.

Chapter 45

Lenka remembers a performance that was put on in the camp. Instruments had been banned, but some of the clever refugees managed to sneak some of them in. She and her family went because they saw it as an act of defiance to their Nazi tormentors.

Anyone who played in the performance knew that it was a death sentence, and their requiem was as much for them as it was as everyone else who was lost. Lenka comments that it was the most beautiful and powerful music she ever heard, and nothing has touched her as much as that performance.

Analysis

Chapter 40

Rita asked Lenka to draw a picture of her with her child, likely knowing that the child wasn't going to survive for more than a few days. Lenka drew the painting, which ended up being her most valuable possession, one that she's getting ready to pass to her granddaughter in the present. Lenka felt so passionately about the drawing that she even used her own blood to add color to it. This is significant and symbolic in that she was literally giving her life's blood to defy the Germans. She was also giving her life's blood to her art.

This was one of the most defiant periods of Lenka's life, where she actively decided to defy German laws because she knew that this is an image that needed to be captured because it summarized so well how awful the Germans were treating them, but also how defiant the captive Jews were in still trying to live their lives. The theme of Risk as well as Living Life are demonstrated in this chapter with the resistance and defiant acts of the Jews, as well as Lenka's portrait of Rita and her child.

Chapter 41

Josef finally comes out and says that one of the reasons why he married Amalia was because he was afraid of being alone. He makes a point of saying that it wasn't the only reason, which is something that readers have been able to infer from the previous chapters. This is also the first time that the reader has any idea how Josef reacted to the news of his falsely reported death, something that had so far only been addressed on Lenka's side of the story.



Chapter 42

One of the new facts introduced to the reader in this chapter is Lenka being transferred to Auschwitz. This is something that had been threatened during Lenka's chapters, but up until this point there was no real indication that Lenka herself had ever been sent there. This chapter brings up the theme of Moving On. Josef defiantly refused to accept the news that Lenka had died, something that he held onto for the rest of his life. While it doesn't end up being true, it had a huge impact on Josef's life up until that fateful meeting in 2000, meaning he spent roughly 60 years refusing to move on from his relationship with Lenka. His refusal to Move On kept him from living his life or enjoying it as deeply as he could have.

Chapter 43

More of the cruelties the Jews were forced to endure are explored in this chapter. Lenka even interjects from the present to tell the reader exactly how overpopulated the ghetto had become. This is unique since for the most part Lenka doesn't interject too many thoughts from the present, but she wants to make it clear just how difficult things were during the winter.

Lenka's friendships in the camp are explored in a little more detail. Lenka finally got the chance to see the drawings that Otto had created. Up until this point, Otto had been very secretive because he didn't want Lenka getting involved in the resistance. Lenka officially got the chance to speak with Petr. Again, a possible relationship is hinted at between the two.

Chapter 44

A relationship between Lenka and Petr is hinted at once again. It's later implied that Lenka was just doing this as a way to cope with the horrible life in the ghetto. She needed some sort of hope to grasp onto, and it was too painful for her to think about her relationship with Josef. Petr did introduce Lenka to Jíří. Jíří is only a relatively minor character in terms of the story. Lenka only had one real interaction with him when she hid her painting, but he's still an important character because his actions have a huge effect on the plot, even though the reader only gets to hear about them. Jíří was the one that smuggled the paintings to the outside, which caused the Germans to come down even harder on the Jews inside the ghetto, especially the art department. This entire chapter, and the events that take place are dedicated and created around the theme of Risk, indicating that Lenka was ready to do almost anything to get back at the Germans.

Chapter 45

At first it might seem like this chapter is out of place, given that Lenka was mostly a spectator to the events that are going on. This chapter largely exists to bring up the theme of Risks, again. The musicians performed even though they know that playing music in the camps was a death sentence. Many of the performers were shipped off to the death camps, yet the musicians keep coming out to play. It isn't just about doing something that's against the law to defy the Germans. The musicians were showing that



they weren't giving up on their life by pouring their hearts and souls into their performances. They wanted the Germans to know that even if their lives were taken, their spirits wouldn't be crushed.

Discussion Question 1

Why were the artists and musicians defiant?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the theme of Risk in these chapters.

Discussion Question 3

How had Josef's inability to Move On hurt his life?

Vocabulary

brazier, beguiling, perplexing, disavow, curmudgeon, nominal, cauterize, monetarily

Chapters 46-50

Summary

Chapter 46

Josef comments how he's always surprised how old he's gotten. When he dreams, he dreams that he is young again and spending a passionate night with Lenka. Every time he wakes up he always has that moment where he has to pause to see if he's old or young.

Chapter 47

(flashback) In the winter of 1944 Fritta showed Lenka a book that he had been drawing for his son. Lenka was touched by what Fritta had drawn. He drew all of the hopes that he had for his child, the birthday cakes he hoped that he would one day receive, and what he might look like on the night of his wedding.

Chapter 48

This chapter is told from the perspective of an 85-year-old Josef, shortly before Jason's wedding. He is getting his affairs in order, knowing that he is going to be passing away soon. He decides to destroy all of the returned letters that he had tried to send to Lenka. He doesn't want his children finding them and thinking that he was unfaithful to their mother. He reads each letter before he destroys them, and his last one details how even after hearing of her death, he refused to believe it.

Chapter 49

Josef talks about how he still sees his lost family members. They don't appear in his dreams like Lenka does. They appear before important moments in his life or the life of his family. Two days before Jason's wedding he sees his family again during a sleepless night. He feels that it is the last time that he is ever going to see them, wondering if that means he is going to die soon.

Chapter 50

(flashback) In the summer of 1944 the camp was preparing for an inspection by the Red Cross. The Germans started to send people away in the thousands. The barracks were reduced to reasonable sizes, and for a few weeks the Jews were treated like actual people. The Germans cleaned them up and provided them with proper food and medical care. They turned Terezin into a proper city, long enough to satisfy the Red Cross. Afterwards, things returned to normal. Some of the paintings were found during all of the cleaning, but they had no idea who they belonged to. Once they were forced to go back to work, everyone in the technical department were careful not to draw anything against regulations, knowing they were being watched.



Analysis

Chapter 46

This chapter also shows the theme of Living Life. Josef is an example of precisely what someone shouldn't do. Josef is trapped in the past and unable to move on. He's in his 80's at the end of the book, but he feels like he hasn't done anything in his life because he's still trapped in a time where he was only 20 and with Lenka. Meanwhile, many of those around him have moved on and they are able to be happy.

Chapter 47

Fritta's book ends up having a profound effect on Lenka. Up until that point, the resistance members have always been shown as drawing bleak pictures which depicted what life was like in the camps. Fritta shows Lenka a colorful book that's filled with hopes and dreams. This is also another example of the theme of Living Life. Fritta is hopeful that his book will be able to inspire his son, and it represents all of the things that he wishes he was able to do so his son could live a full life.

It should be noted that there is a reintroduction of color in this chapter, as if the author is suggesting that life outside of the camp, and life inside the prisoners' minds were full and vibrant, as opposed to the dull and gray reality of life in the camps.

Chapter 48

This chapter is just another example of how Josef was unable to move on from his past with Lenka. His last letter to her was just another way of him denying that she was no longer part of his life. Even when the Red Cross told him that Lenka was dead, he couldn't move on and accept that as a fact. The theme of Moving On is again exemplified by the fact that Josef, as opposed to other characters, has never been able to move on and how that has made his life miserable.

Chapter 49

This is another chapter where Josef focuses on everything that was lost with his family. It is a very short chapter, but focuses on the fact that Josef has spent the remaining years of his life, living a half-life, unable to give up his love and his hope for finding Lenka. Even at the age of 85, he's still focusing on his past relationships.

Chapter 50

This chapter foreshadows the danger that Lenka and the rest of the artists were in during the war. The Germans were angry because the images of the camps were leaked to the public. They quickly come up with a ruse when the Red Cross came to investigate, convincing them that everything is going normally in the camps. One of the important details of this chapter is the fact that the Germans were easily able to provide reasonable conditions for the Jews. They had no trouble bringing in doctors and

cleaning up the camp, not to mention providing it with proper supplies. This shows that they were willingly making the choice to withhold supplies because they didn't consider the Jews worth keeping alive and healthy.

Discussion Question 1

How has Josef crippled himself with his yearning for Lenka?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the theme of Moving On in this section.

Discussion Question 3

What did the visit from the Red Cross uncover and expose?

Vocabulary

pandemonium, platonic, catastrophic, dissonance, sobriety, elite, misanthrope, pedagogical



Chapters 51-55

Summary

Chapter 51

(flashback) In the following weeks more pressure was put on the technical department. Some of their smuggled paintings had finally leaked to the press. The Germans were furious and started to roughly search and interrogate all of the artists. Many of them were sent away, including most of Lenka's friends. Petr was the only one that remained. As time went on, the Germans became even crueler. More people were being sent away, or were executed inside of the camp.

Chapter 52

(flashback continued) The Germans kept interrogating the technical department. Petr was eventually sent to the east with the rest of his family. Lenka discovered that her mother was going to be sent away. Lenka's father volunteered to go as well. They didn't want Lenka and Marta going, but they too volunteered. In the present, Lenka comments on how she's still haunted by the atrocities in Auschwitz. They were packed away into the train cars for days, then forced to walk through the snow. They were dehumanized when they arrived, having all their possessions removed and their names replaced with numbers. Her first days there, Lenka witnessed many Jews being executed or forced to perform demeaning tasks. The only solace she had was when she met her old friend, Dina, who told her about a mural she had drawn for the children in the earlier years.

Chapter 53

In the present, Lenka comments that she carries rosary beads, with each bead representing someone that she lost. She has one for Josef, but also one for both her parents and her sister. (flashback) When they were sent to Auschwitz, they were given the job of sorting through the clothing of everyone who was put into the gas chambers, searching for hidden valuables. Marta would try and secretly throw away the valuables because she'd rather die than give the Nazis any more treasure. She was caught throwing the jewelry away and refused to change her ways, so she was executed on the spot in front of Lenka.

Chapter 54

(flashback) In the winter of 1945, the Germans had to abandon Auschwitz because of the approaching Soviets. Many of the Jews died on the way to the next camp. Lenka only survived because someone mistook her for their daughter and kept her marching through the snow. Later that year, the new camp was abandoned and the Soviet army rescued the surviving Jews. Lenka met an American soldier, Carl Gottlieb, who fell in love with her. She went to America with him and the two were married and had a daughter.

Chapter 55

Lenka returned to Prague later that year, once she was fit enough to travel. She went to visit Lucie and the two mourned the loss of Lenka's family. Lenka discovered the fate of some of the other Jews. Most of them were killed, but Haas and Jíří both managed to survive and were liberated. Thousands of paintings were liberated as well and released into the world. Lenka was able to return to Terezin and uncover the drawing of Rita that Jíří had hidden away for her.

Analysis

Chapter 51

Things managed to worsen in the camp. This was a trend that continued for the rest of Lenka's life until she was finally rescued several years later. Many of her friends were taken away in this chapter, and she later learned that practically all of them died when they were sent to the death camps. This has a profound effect on Lenka and broke her spirit. In the future, she was too afraid to do anything to defy the Germans.

This event and chapter demonstrates the theme of Risk and that often the risk doesn't pay off, or seem to, and it can leave those who survive deeply scarred and damaged emotionally.

Chapter 52

The theme of Family Ties is demonstrated in this chapter when Marta and Lenka refused to abandon their parents. Even Lenka's father showed this theme, since he didn't want to abandon his wife. This is also an example of the theme of Parental Influence, since it's clear that Marta and Lenka get this trait from their father and mother.

The rest of this chapter shows the reader all of the atrocities that the Jews were forced to endure at Auschwitz, which is considered to be the one of the worst concentration camps. Even in such a terrible place, the theme of Living Life is briefly shown when Lenka talked to Dina about the mural that she made. This is the only time that living life to the fullest was even hinted at in Auschwitz.

Chapter 53

Marta's defiance shows the theme of Risks, again. Marta knew that she was going to get killed for what she was doing. Lenka even tried to warn her, but Marta no longer cared. In her eyes, her life was over anyway. She had no hope of ever escaping the camp, and she couldn't stomach her last moments being spent in service to the Germans.

Chapter 54



Lenka shows how broken she was during this chapter. Lenka didn't care about surviving at all. The only reason she survived the march through the winter is because she had someone there to pull her up from the ground and keep her moving. Lenka was just too defeated after losing her family and being forced to work in inhumane conditions.

Carl is introduced towards the end of the chapter. Carl is a fixture in the later years of Lenka's life. Like with Josef and Amalia, Lenka and Carl were never really able to form a traditional relationship.

Chapter 55

The strength of Family Ties is shown once more in this chapter. Even though Lucie wasn't a blood relative, she still considered Lenka to be a member of her family. She held onto their valuables for all that time, and she seemed overjoyed when Lenka arrived. Along with the other valuables, Lenka also went to get the painting that she drew of Rita, which she ends up passing down to her granddaughter in the present.

This picture that Lenka created will become a symbol of their heritage and how life is a precious gift, that her granddaughter, and their children, should embrace life and be thankful and grateful for the gift of it. It is also a reminder to never forget what was lost.

Discussion Question 1

What does Lenka's picture of Rita and her baby come to represent to Lenka?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the theme of Family Ties in this section.

Discussion Question 3

Why did Marta defy the German soldiers?

Vocabulary

practicality, amenable, forensic, preposterous, simplistic, gaudy, fraudulent, adamant, vehemently, platonic

Chapters 56-58

Summary

Chapter 56

(flashback) Lenka was married to Carl later that year. The two of them went on to have a daughter, Elisa, named after Lenka's mother. Lenka tried to be a good wife to Carl, but she had a hard time feeling the same love for him that she did for Josef. Her life felt empty, but there were some moments that managed to shine through, such as the birth of her daughter. Lenka was happy that her daughter was an artist as well. Lenka only drew in private, and she kept hidden the horrors she endured from her daughter.

Chapter 57

(flashback) Lenka was married to Carl for more than 50 years. She struggled every day with the demons of her past. She constantly had nightmares about Elisa being in the camps with her. She was always gracious for Carl, and she did love him for rescuing her and helping her. As an adult, Elisa grew up and had her own daughter, Eleanor. Carl eventually passed away to cancer, but before he did Lenka made sure he knew how much she cared for him and appreciated all that he had done. The chapter ends with Lenka writing a letter to Eleanor, explaining the significance of the painting she was about to receive for her wedding.

Chapter 58

This chapter goes back to the present with Josef getting ready for the wedding. He meets up with Isaac and his family before they leave for the wedding. Josef realizes how old he has gotten, but on the way to the wedding he also realizes that he is lucky to live such a life, and he's glad that he'll get to see his grandson getting married.

Analysis

Chapter 56

Just like with Josef, Lenka only seems to be alive when it comes to events involving her child. Lenka wants her child to be able to live like to the fullest. Lenka knows that she isn't going to be able to get past all of the horrible atrocities in her life. Unlike Josef, Lenka actually seems to be making a genuine effort. Like Josef, she is held back by memories of the past. In Lenka's case, it makes more sense because of the sheer magnitude of what she was forced to endure. As the last chapters show, Lenka was also genuinely trying to be a good wife and start over. She wasn't in denial about the reality like Josef was, she was just too scarred by the atrocities inflicted upon her by the Germans.



Chapter 57

This chapter directly follows up and goes into more detail about the life that Lenka tried to establish in the previous chapter. Lenka truly did want to move on and start living life to the fullest, but she had just suffered too much damage to recover. She did her best and worked hard to make sure that her daughter had the opportunities that were taken away from her. When Carl was on his death bed, Lenka made a genuine effort to thank Carl for everything that he did. Unlike with Josef, it seemed like she really did try to love him and capture the romance from her former life, but she was just too damaged by everything that happened in the camps.

Chapter 58

This chapter ends up being bittersweet, since it seems like Josef is finally getting ready to move on and start living his life. Unfortunately, it comes at a point where he's already very old. Josef at least realizes that he was able to pass on a good life for his children, and he seems very happy that they've been able to live their lives to the fullest.

Discussion Question 1

What is bittersweet about Josef's realization at the end of the book?

Discussion Question 2

Compare Lenka's handling of the war to Josef's handling of the war.

Discussion Question 3

Why was it important to Lenka that Rita's portrait be saved and preserved?

Vocabulary

anarchist, plebeian, anachronistic, parole, lamentable, etude, parallax, wanton, phalanx

Characters

Josef

Josef is one of the main characters of the book, although his story isn't focused on nearly as much as the other main character, Lenka. Josef is an obstetrician that's haunted by his memories of the war. He lost his family and his wife to the Germans.

He ends up marrying a fellow refugee, but his heart still belongs to his lost love. Josef cares greatly for his kids, which feel like the one bright spot in his life. He's dedicated his life to helping children because he feels like it's the only way he can try and make up for all the lives that were lost during the holocaust.

As a youth, Josef was a very different person. He was very charismatic and even a bit rebellious. His father wanted him to be a doctor, and while Josef was very smart, he wanted to be able to choose his own path in life. As an adult, Josef realizes that his father just cared about him and wasn't trying to be controlling, he just wanted the best for his son.

Lenka

Lenka is the other main character, and the majority of the book is focused on her story. From a young age, Lenka had a passion and talent for art. Lenka fell in love with Josef at a young age, but she didn't leave with him to America because she refused to give up on her family. Lenka was forced to live in the ghetto, and later in a death camp where she lost the rest of her family.

During the occupation, Lenka loses her innocence and becomes focused solely on survival and finding ways to resist the Nazi occupation. Lenka turns to her art, using it as a way to brighten the spirits of everyone in the camp as well as a way of capturing some of the atrocities that she's witnessed. Once she is sent to Auschwitz, Lenka is beaten down and feels like her life is over. When she is freed, she struggles to make a life of her own. Like Josef, the only bright spot in her life seems to be her children.

As a youth, Lenka was very different. She was filled with energy and had an appreciation for the beauty of life. She was constantly drawing in color and always seemed to be in very good spirits.

Lenka's Parents

Lenka's parents are a huge part of her life, although Lenka spends the majority of the book separated from them. Her father is sentenced to work hard labor, while her mother is sent to take care of the children. Lenka smuggles art supplies to her mother to use for the children. Both of her parents are killed when they arrive in Auschwitz.



As a child, Lenka discovered that her mother had a passion for art. She isn't sure what made her mother stop drawing. Her father was a glassworker, who was constantly bringing gifts home for the family.

Josef's Parents

Josef's parents are only featured very briefly in the book. Josef's mother is barely featured. His father is a doctor who keeps pressuring Josef to follow in his footsteps. His father dies ensuring that Josef is put onto a lifeboat when their ship to America sinks.

Lucie

Lucie is Lenka's nanny, but she's treated like she's part of the family. Lucie helps to take care of Lenka's family when the occupation first begins. The Jews are very limited in what they are able to get, having only tickets for meager rations. Lucie constantly came by to provide the family with food, and she hid all of their valuables from the Germans when they were moved into the ghetto.

Marta

Marta is Lenka's younger sister. Lenka was initially jealous of Marta because she felt like attention was being taken away from her. Lenka quickly got over that and the two were very close. Marta isn't featured for most of the book. When she is shown, she's angry and defiant for the Germans. She refuses to do any work for them when the family is sent to Auschwitz, so the Germans execute her right in front of Lenka.

Věruška

Věruška is Josef's younger sister and Lenka's best friend at the art academy. She is shown as being very positive and chatty. She dies when Josef and the rest of his family are trying to escape from the sinking ship leaving for America.

Amalia

Amalia is a Jewish refugee who eventually marries Josef. The two of them are said to love one another, but it's clear that they're both still lost in the past. They care deeply for their children, which seems to be what makes them feel alive. Towards the end of the book, Josef discovers that Amalia was having an affair with his best friend, Isaac.



Isaac

Isaac is one of the survivors from the lifeboat that Josef escaped on. He became a famous violin player as an adult. Josef discovers that Isaac had an affair with his wife, but it didn't seem to affect their friendship.

Rebekkah

Rebekkah is Josef's daughter. She's only mentioned a few times as being very intelligent and having a successful marriage. Josef is happy whenever he sees her daughter because the love she has for her husband reminds him of the relationship that he used to have with Lenka.

Rita

Rita is a fellow painter that Lenka befriends when she's in Terezin. She's the one who introduces the idea of the resistance to Lenka. Rita ends up getting pregnant. She tries to hide her pregnancy by limiting what she eats. Her child is born, but it's very sick and only lives for a few short days. After that, Rita and her husband are taken away and sent off to one of the death camps.

Petr Kien

Petr is one of the painters in the resistance movement. Lenka feels attracted towards him initially, but nothing ever comes of her feelings because he's already married. Lenka is very inspired by his artwork.

Fritta

Fritta is another member of the resistance. He's in charge of the technical department where Lenka is eventually moved. He refuses to give up the names of any of the artists and is sent to a death camp.

Otto

Otto is another one of the artists in the technical department. Otto tries to talk Lenka out of being in the resistance because he considers it too dangerous. He's an older man with a wife and child. When the Germans discover that art was leaked, he's sent off to a death camp.

Haas

Haas is Fritta's second in command, and the only artist of the resistance besides Lenka that survives. Lenka runs into him after the war and he reveals the fate of the rest of the resistance members.

Jason

Jason is Josef's grandson, who is marrying Lenka's granddaughter. His marriage is what prompts Lenka and Josef to meet again after so many years.

Jakob

Jakob is Josef's other son. Jakob is very intelligent, but also suffers from an unnamed mental illness. While he's capable of taking care of himself, he doesn't want to leave Josef's care.

Jíří

Jíří is an engineer in Terezin that helps the resistance. He's responsible for getting the paintings out to the world, and he helps to hide thousands of other paintings from the Germans.

Carl Gottlieb

Carl is a soldier that rescues Lenka and the other surviving Jews at the end of the book. He fell in love with Lenka and the two of them entered into a relationship. Lenka didn't love him like Josef, but she did at least appreciate everything that he did for her.

Symbols and Symbolism

Paintings

Paintings are used throughout the book to symbolize different things. In the camps, the paintings serve two purposes. The brighter paintings are done to inspire the prisoners and try to remind them that there's beauty in the world. The darker, grim paintings represent resistance. The Jews are capturing the reality of their lives, something that the Germans forbid because they don't want the rest of the world to know how they are really being treated.

Letter to New York

When Amalia is telling Josef her story, she mentions how she was rescued because she found a letter addressed to someone in New York. Amalia got in touch with them, and they ended up getting her papers and bringing her over to America. Amalia was initially touched by the letter because to her it represented her hope for life in the world outside of the ghettos and camps.

Obstetrician Ledger

Josef keeps track of every single child he delivers in his ledger. He compares the number of children born to the number of deaths during the holocaust. To him, this is a way of trying to make up for all of the lives that were senselessly lost.

Television

Josef bought a television for his family. For him, the television filled the silence that was in their lives and acted as a distraction for the pain they were both trying to deal with.

Story of the Golem

During the early parts of the occupation, a younger Lenka tells Marta the story of the Golem. The story is meant to inspire hope for Marta.

Strawberries

For Josef, strawberries are a direct reminder of Lenka. Whenever he sees strawberries, he's reminded of the time they spent together during vacation.

Lack of Color

During the occupation, Lenka gives up on using colors in her paintings. This directly reflects with the dark mood throughout the occupied town.

Paper with wedding date/name

When Josef and Lenka are about to separate, they write down their names and wedding date on a piece of paper. This is the only gesture of affection they are able to show towards one another during the occupation, and it represents their love for one another.

Yellow Stars of David

The Germans made the Jews wear yellow Stars of David to identify themselves. In their eyes, it marked the Jews as inferior and was a way to dehumanize them.

Piles of Clothing

Whenever an adult Lenka encounters piles of clothing, she's reminded of the atrocities at Auschwitz. Her job was to go through piles of clothing to find whatever valuables might have been hidden.

Settings

New York (1940's-2000)

When Josef arrives in America he spends the rest of his life in New York. Lenka eventually makes it over to there as well.

Prague (1920's-1940)

The beginning of the book is set in Prague, before the occupation. This is where Lenka and Josef first meet, and where Lenka attends school. Lenka spends some time in Prague during the occupation before the Jews are sent off to the ghettos.

Karlovy Vary (late 1930's)

Karlovy Vary is the vacation spot where Josef's family took Lenka. This is where Lenka and Josef first get the chance to speak and start their relationship.

Terezin (1940-1943)

Terezin is the ghetto where Lenka and her family are relocated. It was originally a small town, meant only for a population of at most 7,000. Lenka reports that their highest numbers were around 50,000. The Jews were treated horribly and forced to work. They were given little in the way of food or medical care. There was a small resistance movement that painted what life was really like in the ghettos. When the Germans found out about this, most of the artists were either killed or sent to worse camps.

Auschwitz (1944)

Lenka is sentenced to Auschwitz with the rest of her family towards the end of the book. This is one of the worst death camps. The Jews are treated even worse than in Terezin. They're frequently beaten or killed outright. Everyone is constantly fighting one another in desperation, trying to get access to whatever meager supplies are available.

Themes and Motifs

Parental Influence

This theme is first shown in the very beginning of the book. Lenka is discovering her love of art through Lucie's intervention. When Lenka is later going through storage, she's surprised to find drawings that must have come from her mother. She has no idea what made her mother stop pursuing her art, but she knows that she must have inherited it from her.

When Lenka has a daughter, she discovers that her daughter has a passion for art as well. Just like her mother, Lenka has stopped drawing by this point, but she still encourages her daughter to draw.

The theme is shown once again through the character of Josef. At a younger age, Josef felt like he was being forced to become a doctor simply because it was what his father had done. Josef wasn't interested because he wanted to be the one making decisions.

As an adult, he realized that his father wasn't forcing him to do anything; he was just trying to guide him into having a successful life. This is a trait that Josef inherits, and he realizes that he's doing it with his own children. He wishes that his father was still around so he could apologize for being so resistant and not understanding.

The theme is also very briefly shown through Josef's daughter, Rebekkah. Josef observes that Rebekkah and her husband have a relationship that mirrors the intensity he had with Lenka. The way that they hold hands is exactly like what Josef and Lenka used to do.

Family Ties

This theme is one of the driving forces of the book. The theme is first shown when Josef is trying to get Lenka to leave. Josef marries Lenka because he wants to take her away from the occupation and start life over in America. Lenka refuses because Josef isn't going to be able to take her family with her. She directly says the name of the theme, refusing to leave her family knowing how bad the occupation will be for them.

The theme is shown again through the families in Terezin. It's first shown with Lenka's family. They stick together, even when Lenka's father is put into a separate barracks. They still try to see him as frequently as possible, and the women that are still together protect one another in the barracks.

Lenka sees this behavior with some of the other families as well when she's in Terezin. She even notes how strange it is when new refugees come in who start fighting with one another for supplies, since she's used to everyone looking out for one another.



The theme is demonstrated again towards the end of the book. When the artists are caught and being sentenced to new locations, many of the families step forward and volunteer to be sent away as well. Lenka and the rest of her family do this when her mother is sentenced to the death camps. At first it's just her father who does it, not wanting the children to go with them. Marta and Lenka don't listen, again naming the theme as they volunteer to make the trip with their parents.

Living Life

This theme is shown early on in the story, before the occupation. Both Josef's and Lenka's parents encourage their respective children to live their life to the fullest. Lenka is encouraged to pursue her art, not only by her parents, but also by Lucie.

Her father is constantly bringing gifts to the family, wanting to make them feel happy and appreciate their lives. Josef's father is trying to get him to become a doctor because he wants him to have a successful career so he can make the most out of his life.

The theme is demonstrated again by Lenka and Josef as adults. This also ties into the previous theme of people being like their parents. Josef and Lenka both encourage their own children to live their life to the fullest.

Josef pushes for them to get successful careers, and he's constantly trying to take care of Jakob and even feels bad later on when he thinks that his presence is holding Jakob back. Lenka encourages her daughter to pursue her art, even though Lenka has given up on it herself.

In a very twisted way, the theme is shown through Josef, Lenka, and Amalia during and after the occupation. These characters are all affected by the war, and are unable to live their life to the fullest because of the pain that they carry. They are shown to be depressed and just drifting through life, showing what happens if you don't live your life to the fullest. They do have some moments where they embody this trait, such as when their children are born.

Letting Go

This theme is shown fairly consistently throughout the book. The first time that it really comes up is when Josef is talking about his life after he escaped to America. Josef spent years writing letters to Lenka, even though they were being returned to him. Even when Josef was told that Lenka died, he refused to believe it. Josef pursued a relationship with Amalia, but he refused to let go of the past. If he had learned to move on, his marriage to Amalia would have had a chance at being successful and the two could have been much happier.

The theme is subsequently shown through Lenka's relationship with Carl at the end of the book. Just like with Josef, Lenka has a hard time moving on from her relationship with Josef. She keeps thinking about him, even though she was told that he had passed



away. Lenka is never able to love again because she doesn't move on. Lenka recognizes this towards the end of her relationship with Carl, and she at least makes sure that he knows how much she appreciates everything that he has done for her.

The theme is shown very briefly with Isaac and Amalia. Josef discovers that Amalia and Isaac were a couple when he sees how torn up Isaac acts when she passes away. Josef isn't angry because he knew that Isaac and Amalia had a more genuine relationship and truly cared for one another. In her own way, this is Amalia finally getting to move on and experience a loving relationship.

Risks

This theme is prominently shown through the various artists living in the ghetto. Lenka first discovers the resistance when she learns that there are people drawing what life is really like. This is something that is outlawed by the Germans because they don't want anyone knowing that they are torturing the Jews and treating them in inhumane ways.

Lenka wants to join the resistance, even though she had up until then just wanted to obey to avoid trouble. Lenka knows that things aren't going to get any better for them, so she wants to fight back.

The resistance isn't just about exposing the truth to the rest of the world. They also try and steal supplies from the Germans because they want to give their children art supplies. This helps to raise the spirits of the children. Fritta especially shows this when he reveals to Lenka the book that he made for his child's birthday.

The musicians also briefly show this theme, performing in the camp even though it was outlawed. They know that they are going to be punished and likely killed for it, but to them it's worth doing to defy the Germans.

The theme is finally demonstrated towards the end of the book through Marta's action. Marta is so frustrated and angry with the German's that she refuses to do their work anymore. Instead of giving them the hidden treasures she finds, she throws them into the latrine. She refuses to get the treasures when it's cost, even though she knows that she'll be killed for resisting. Just like with the musicians, she'd give her life just to defy the Germans.

Styles

Point of View

Lost Wife is told from the first person perspective of the two main characters, Josef and Lenka. Each chapter is clearly labeled to indicate which character is doing the narration. For the most part, the chapters tend to follow the pattern of being two chapters from one character, and then two from the other. For some of Lenka's parts, this is changed as she gets more chapters in a row. The difference in characters gives the readers a chance to experience the world through the eyes of each character. The majority of the book is told in flashback form, as though the character were directly narrating the events to the reader. Sometimes the character will interject with their thoughts from the present. This is most common with Josef, since his story spans more time. Lenka will occasionally interject with statistics that she learned from research in the present day.

Language and Meaning

Because so much of the book is focused on Lenka, a lot of the text references art. Lenka is constantly studying the appearance of things with an artist eye. She talks about the emotions that her art invokes, and frequently focuses on color, or lack therefore of. There are a couple of Hebrew terms used, and some Jewish holidays are referred to. There are always clear context clues to give the reader some indication of what is being discussed.

Structure

Lost Wife is told in a very erratic fashion since it shifts from the perspective of each character. Josef's sections are all over the place as far as time goes. He starts off in the present, but then jumps around through various points of his life. He'll go from talking about his wife's funeral to talking about the birth of his children in the next chapter. His sections are also very vague with mentioning the specific years. Josef's sections are noticeably shorter than Lenka's. Many of his chapters are at most a page or two in length, with some even just being a few paragraphs.

In comparison, Lenka's sections are told in a much more linear fashion. She will occasionally interject her thoughts from the present, but otherwise her story is told in a straightforward fashion. She also frequently mentions the year in her parts of the story. This is because her events directly coincide with real world historical events.

Quotes

““Do you remember me now?” he asked, trembling. She looked at him again, as if giving weight and bone to a ghost. “Lenka, it’s me,” he said. “Josef. Your husband.”

-- Josef (chapter 1 paragraph 19)

Importance: This chapter ends on a cliffhanger and helps to set up what the book will be about.

First love: there is nothing like it. All these years later, I can remember the first time I looked up and saw Josef’s face, the flash of recognition that defied words.”

-- Lenka (chapter 5 paragraph 12)

Importance: This passage highlights the strong feelings that Lenka has for Josef, something that the readers soon learn is returned by Josef.

I had delivered 2,838 children by the time I retired. Every name I recorded was as meaningful to me as the first. Every time I placed the tip of my pen on the space in the lined paper, I paused to think of the million and a half children who perished in the Holocaust. I imagined that after so many years in the profession, my feelings of honoring the dead would lessen, but they never did.

-- Josef (chapter 6 paragraph 5)

Importance: This passage shows Josef’s mindset in the present. He’s deeply affected by the events that shaped his past. As a doctor, he did everything he could to try and make up for all of the lives that were lost during the holocaust.

I could finally peel away the layers of his formality, his rigidity, and see the human part hidden beneath. I could see how I wrestled with my own expectations that I held for my son—ones that probably would never be achieved—and understood how frustrated my father must have been with me.”

-- Josef (chapter 6 paragraph 8)

Importance: This passage highlights one of the themes of the book. It also shows the relationship between Josef and his father, which frequently comes up in his sections of the book.

“I open my eyes and Amalia is reaching to turn the radio alarm off. She kisses me. Dryly. Absently. The taste of water. My Amalia kissing me. There isn’t the faintest taste of strawberries in her kiss.”

-- Josef (chapter 13 paragraph 13)

Importance: This is one of many passages that shows Josef is trapped in the past. Even though he’s gone on to marry someone else, his true love is still Lenka.



No,” I said. “Promise me you will also get my whole family passports, or otherwise, the answer is no.”

-- Lenka (chapter 15 paragraph 12)

Importance: This is a major turning point in the book since it leads to Lenka and Josef being separated. It also shows the theme of family sticking together, which comes up several more times in Lenka’s part of the story.

“I did love Amalia. Those who ever doubted that are wrong. One finds love in transparency. To see wholly and without question.”

-- Josef (chapter 17 paragraph 6)

Importance: This passage is important because it does acknowledge that Amalia and Josef did have feelings for one another. It isn’t the same type of romantic love that Josef and Lenka had, instead being more like a strong friendship.

I know you’re scared, my love. But you will be fine, Lenka. Even if you have to raise the child without Josef for a little while, you will have us. You will never be alone.

-- Lenka's Family (chapter 21 paragraph 76)

Importance: This is a great example of the love that Lenka’s family has for her, and how supportive they’re willing to be towards one another. It makes it that much more painful when Lenka ends up losing them all by the end of the book, and helps the reader understand just how much she was broken by her time in the camps.

“But in my heart, I knew that even in the best years of our marriage, the sensation of Amalia’s hand never gave me the same thrill or comfort as Lenka’s. But when Amalia’s heart stopped beating and her hand grew cold, I ached, yearning for that fleeting sense of warmth and comfort, all the same.”

-- Josef (chapter 25 paragraph 12)

Importance: This gives the readers another unique insight into the type of relationship that Josef had with Amalia.

So that night, as I go to sleep, I don’t dream of Lenka, as usual, but of Amalia. I let her finally go back to her family. I say good-bye to her, and I see her as I did the first day I met her, a cotton dress and wispy blond hair. I see her beside me at Café Vienna, a cloud of steam rising over her cup of hot chocolate, her brown eyes cloudy with tears.”

-- Josef (chapter 35 paragraph 4)

Importance: This is another passage that explores the type of relationship that Josef had with Amalia. It’s important because it does show that Josef cared about Amalia, and he was actually affected by her death. Up until this point, Josef had been rather callous about the way he spoke of Amalia’s passing, which could have given readers the impression that he wasn’t affected by it.

“With the painting between us, it is as if Petr and I have become lovers who have never touched.”

-- Lenka (chapter 44 paragraph 1)

Importance: This chapter shows the strong feelings that Lenka had towards Petr. Nothing ends up becoming of the relationship, but it shows that Lenka was at least willing to move on from Josef's death, which is one of the themes of the story.

Every night as I went to bed, I looked at the black-and-white photograph of him in his army uniform. His thick head of hair, his dark brown eyes full of the compassion he had since that first day. This is how I filled the canvas of our marriage. I filled it with gratitude. For no matter what else happened, I would always think of Carl as the one who saved me.”

-- Lenka (chapter 57 paragraph 23)

Importance: This passage is a perfect example of the relationship that Lenka has with Carl. Lenka genuinely tried to move on from her past, but she was unable to escape the horrors she experienced at the hands of the Nazi's. Even in her broken state, she acknowledges that Carl was always there for her, and she wishes that she was able to do more to be a good wife. This is in stark contrast to the relationship that Josef had with Amalia.